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U.S. Search Is On for 5 Terrorists Reported Planning to Kill Reagan

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 3.—The Government has received detailed reports that five terrorists trained in Libya entered the United States last weekend with plans to assassinate President Reagan or other senior Administration officials, according to top Federal law-enforcement officials.

The reports, which the officials declined to discuss in detail, have prompted a huge nationwide search for the potential assassins and Americans to whom they might turn for assistance, these officials said.

Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Secret Service have been deployed around the country in recent days to question Americans who have past links to Libya, including veterans of the Army Special Forces, or Green Berets, who have worked in the militant Arab nation in North Africa training terrorists in an operation organized by a former American intelligence agent, Edwin P. Wilson.

Search On for Mercenaries

Agents of the F.B.I. in the field said in telephone interviews that they had orders to find and question other military veterans who had worked overseas in mercenary operations and were skilled in the handling of weapons and explosives.

Concern about a Libyan threat has mounted in recent weeks as initially unconfirmed intelligence reports were buttressed by information supplied by an informant who has given American intelligence agencies first-hand descriptions of the training and plans for assassinations, according to senior Administration officials.

They said that this informant, who has been closely questioned by the F.B.I., Secret Service and Central Intelligence Agency, told the Government that he helped train assassination teams in Libya and worked on the preparation of specific plans to attack President Reagan and other top Government officials.

These plans, intelligence and law-enforcement officials said today, include a plot to kill Mr. Reagan by shooting down Air Force One, the Presidential jet, with a surface-to-air missile, blowing up the President's limousine with a rocket or

attacking the President at close range with small arms.

The informer, who is not an American but was otherwise not identified by these sources, also supplied the Government with detailed information about the infiltration of terrorists into the United States. It is not known whether he provided names or descriptions of assassination team members.

Intelligence officials said the informer's account had stood up to intense questioning and his credibility, which is now considered good, had "made believers" out of law-enforcement officials. His information has also been echoed by other sources, including intelligence information received early in the fall that Muammar el-Qaddafi, the leader of Libya, was planning to seek revenge for the shooting down of two Libyan jets in an aerial dogfight with American planes last August.

The apparent threat against the President has led to a significant increase in security for Mr. Reagan and other top Government officials, according to White House aides.

Officials said, for example, that Air Force One had been equipped with sophisticated electronic equipment that would allow pilots to evade a missile attack. Mr. Reagan has also begun riding in unmarked cars instead of his official limousine in Presidential motorcades. In addition, the Secret Service has recently begun sending "dummy" motorcades through Washington that appear to be carrying senior Administration officials but actually involve only security agents.

Haig Security Increased

State Department officials said earlier this week that security for Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. had also been increased recently.

Senior intelligence officials said today that there was evidence that the attempted shooting of an American diplomat in Paris last month was organized by Libya. In that attack, a gunman fired six shots at Christian A. Chapman, the chargé d'affaires at the American Embassy, as he was leaving his home. Mr. Chapman, who took shelter behind his car, was not hit. The gunman escaped.

These intelligence sources also said that the United States Ambassador to Italy, Maxwell M. Rabb, was the target of a Libyan assassination plot in October. Mr. Rabb was hastily flown out of Milan in October and returned to the United States after security officials learned that an attack might be imminent. He has returned to his post, but security measures have been increased.

Intelligence officials indicated today that C.I.A. analysts believe Colonel Qaddafi's initial threats following the downing of the two jets may have been further inflamed by published reports that the American Government was considering plans to underwrite an assassination attempt against the Libyan leader. These officials denied that the United States ever contemplated trying to kill Colonel Qaddafi.

'Have Absolute, Hard Proof'

"We have absolute, hard proof that Libya has sent assassination teams into other countries," said a senior intelligence official. "When the first reports came in that Qaddafi might be considering attacks on American officials, they had to be viewed seriously, but some of the stories seemed unbelievable. Those doubts have been overcome by the accounts of the informant. We consider this to be a very serious threat."

Law enforcement officials said today that the assassination teams, which apparently include Libyans and recruits from other Middle Eastern nations, have orders to attack lesser Government officials if they fail to kill Mr. Reagan. There is also evidence, they said, that additional potential targets include members of Mr. Reagan's family.

"They want to make a sensation," said one senior law enforcement official, referring to the goal of the Libyan teams. "If they can't get the President, they're apparently under instructions to kill anyone close to him."

Law enforcement officials said all American ports of entry were being closely monitored by the F.B.I., the Customs Service and other agencies. Particular attention is being paid to entry points on the border with Canada, including Detroit where officials believe infiltration may be attempted.

The informant has told the Government that assassination team members may try to recruit Americans to help them, according to intelligence sources. They added that so far there was no indication that any of the assassination team members were trained in Libya by Americans or others working for Mr. Wilson, the former C.I.A. agent who was charged last year with illegally shipping explosives to Libya as part of an operation to train terrorists there.

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